Jacek Mydla
University of Silesia, Katowice

Joanna Baillie's Theatre of Sympathy and Imagination

Introduction

Joanna Baillie (1762–1851) and her works have long lain outside the centre of literary studies. However, if we were to judge by her presence in anthologies of literature, she has recently ("been") moved closer to the centre; we can now find her poems in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, and the Broadview *Anthology of Romantic Drama* contains her 1812 "Gothic" play *Orra*. Broadview has, besides, published a critical edition of the first collection, published originally in an anonymous volume in 1798, of *Plays on the Passions* (see references for details), a writing project that extended over a number of years. Apart from numerous theses devoted to particular aspects of Baillie's work, there is – among other books – a new critical biography (Judith Bailey Slagle's *Joanna Baillie, a Literary Life*) and a copious two-volume edition of her letters.

There is a larger context to this reclaiming and restitution: "Over the past two decades," – writes Jonathan Mulrooney – "scholars of British theatre in the long eighteenth century have produced some of the most imaginative and exciting work in contemporary cultural studies" (249). What we have been witnessing for some time now can be described as the "de-peripherisation" of romantic drama, and of female romantic drama in particular. Thanks to this process, Baillie now – once more – occupies centre stage. In other words, she has largely reclaimed the position she held two hundred years ago.

This article is another attempt at de-peripherisation, but also at making central an issue that cultural-studies-oriented scholars have chosen to ignore. I examine here three ways in which the drama of Baillie is related to the imagination; this means that I pick up a problem that may seem peripheral in drama and theatre studies, but one which, as we shall see, is central to the theoretical concerns with which Baillie occupied herself in her dramaturgy.

In what follows I address two major concerns: philosophical (epistemological and moral) and (meta) theatrical. The larger philosophical context involves the philosophy of the mind (chiefly Scottish) as an influence on Baillie's drama. This epistemological aspect of the relation between the passions and the imagination is tightly intertwined with some moral ramifications: the troubled – and even potentially catastrophic – relation between the imagination and the passions supplied sources for the conflicts that Baillie represented ("staged"), or, as we might put it, "studied" in her plays.

If a philosophy of the mind, with an inseparable moral dimension, informs Baillie's dramaturgy, this philosophy has necessarily undergone a transmutation due to the way in which Baillie, as her project of "plays on the passions" compelled her to, needed to work out a manner of showing the workings of the imagination on the stage. Especially interesting in this context are cases of pathological tensions between the private and the public spheres, tensions that arise from the process whereby philosophical introversion has to be transmuted into theatrical interpersonality and sociability.[1] The relationship between the broader philosophical framework of Baillie's work and the way in which it is put to use in drama, and thus given a largely novel theatrical facet, cannot be an easy one to unravel. As we shall see, there is indeed some variance between the conceptual and theatrical contexts of her engagement with the passions and the imagination.

[1] This is to be taken in a double sense, because we have to distinguish between (1) the social world portrayed in drama from (2) the performance as a social event. Baillie consistently devised her plays as "acting plays," i.e., ones intended for performance, no matter how critical she was with the actual conditions of staging in the London royal theatres.

Baillie and the Passions

Long forgotten but recently rediscovered, Joanna Baillie's plays – and the project they represented – earned her once the reputation of a playwright who revived the tradition of serious or legitimate drama. An anecdote frequently quoted by those few scholars who have published on Baillie features Lord Byron, with whom Baillie was a great favourite ("there are fine things in all the Plays on the Passions," qtd. in Brewer, 167): in response to Voltaire's supposition that "the composition of a tragedy requires *testicles*," Byron wrote: "If this be true Lord knows what Joanna Baillie does – I suppose she borrows them."[2] As we shall see, Baillie encroached also upon another supposedly male terrain, that of philosophy. Even though she was not unanimously extolled by her contemporaries, praise was often heard. For instance, in 1802 (Baillie having turned forty, with decades of active life awaiting her) a critic wrote that "even if her pen were now to be inactive … [she] would be always celebrated among the brightest luminaries of the present period" (qtd., after a reviewer in the *British Critic*, in Slagle, 95). In the words of her friend, Sir Walter Scott, Baillie was "the best dramatic writer whom Britain has produced since the days of Shakespeare and Massinger" (qtd. in Brewer, 166).[3]

Baillie made her debut as a playwright in 1798 with an anonymous publication of three plays (the full title of the book reads *A Series of Plays: In Which It Is Attempted to Delineate the Stronger Passions of the Mind. Each Passion Being the Subject of a Tragedy and a Comedy*).[4] The project, as it was originally devised, involved the composition of two plays, a comedy and a tragedy, on each of the major passions (love, hate, ambition, fear, hope, remorse, jealousy, pride, envy, revenge, anger, joy, grief) (Duthie, 24).[5] The 1798 publication contained two tragedies, one on love

[2] Byron's letter to John Murray (Venice, April 2nd 1817): Byron 1976, 203. Italics and punctuation according to the source publication.

[3] Like Byron, Scott showed some eagerness in getting Baillie's plays staged.

[4] Earlier, in 1790, Baillie published, also anonymously, some poetry.

[5] As Duthie points out, by 1812 Baillie had changed her original plan, explaining that joy, grief, and anger were "too transient," pride "dull," and envy "too disgusting in Tragedy," and to be endured only in "Comedy or Farce." Being thus left with remorse, jealousy,

and the other on hatred, and a comedy on love. Significantly, it was prefaced by an essay entitled "Introductory Discourse," in which Baillie presented her theory of drama based on the notion of "sympathetick [sic] curiosity."

Engagements with the philosophy of the human mind can be found in all thirteen of her plays on the passions. As we shall see on the example of the plays discussed below, these engagements necessitated a preoccupation with the imagination. Like the philosophy of her times that inspired her, Baillie's interest in the strong passions obliged her to explore the links between those and the imagination. This is perhaps most conspicuous in her two plays on the passion of fear, *Orra* and *The Dream* (both published in 1812).

In *Orra*, the title heroine's irrational, indeed pathological, fear of the supernatural, described as "the secret weakness of her mind" (90),[6] is cause of her madness in bizarre if not somewhat ridiculous circumstances; she loses her mind in the moment when she is about to be rescued from imprisonment in a gloomy castle. Her hyperactive imagination is the immediate cause of her death: "Her mind within itself holds a dark world/Of dismal phantasies and horrid forms!" (152). The hero of *The Dream*, "imperial general" Osterloo dies of fear a minute before an order is delivered to prevent his execution. Osterloo's mind has been agitated into frenzy, not so much by a presentiment of imminent death, as by thoughts on the abyss of an Unknown Beyond that death opens. As he describes it: when the mind tries to apprehend death, it finds itself suspended over a yawning gulf of "the unknown, the unbounded, the unfathomable" (188). In both these instances, Baillie gives an excruciating examination of what in the playtext of *The Dream* is described as the

and revenge, she subsequently deleted revenge from her plan as a passion which is "frequently exposed." She realised her project, in this curtailed form, over a period of almost 30 years (1798–1836), and the three volumes which belong to the "series" include: *Count Basil* (a tragedy on love), *The Tryal* (a comedy on love), *De Monfort* (a tragedy on hate), *The Election* (a comedy on hatred), *Ethwald* (a tragedy on ambition; in two parts), *The Second Marriage* (a comedy on ambition), *Orra* (a tragedy on fear, of the supernatural), *The Dream* (a tragedy on fear, of death), *The Siege* (a comedy on fear), *The Beacon* (a musical drama on hope), *Romiero* (a tragedy on jealousy), *The Alienated Manor* (a comedy on jealousy), and *Henriquez* (a tragedy on remorse). See the "Chronology" section in Duthie's edition.

[6] All citations, by page number, to these two plays are to Baillie 2007.

"inward agonies of imagination" (187). As we have already suggested, we may speak here of attempts at bringing forth, at putting on display what naturally remains hidden from view. To put it differently, Baillie's goal is to address anew and redefine the customary relation between within and without in drama; while traditionally the outside (mime, actions, etc.: a play's mimetic, stagey content) are for the audience the indices of mental goings-on, Baillie's goal is to, as it were, *stage the mind*. The audience's interest is to be directed to the inner workings of the human mind as the source and cause of events represented on the stage. Taking into account the larger context, which we shall examine subsequently, Baillie's project of "plays on the passions" consists in combining dramaturgy and the philosophy of the mind. And so, before we examine in more detail the two earliest tragedies on the passions (*De Monfort* and *Count Basil*), we discuss briefly that philosophical context.

The Epistemology of Sympathy

That modern philosophy in Britain was occupied with passions becomes obvious not only when we look into John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*; significant for the history of this problematic is also Francis Hutcheson's critique of Thomas Hobbes's and Bernard Mandeville's views on man's supposed natural selfishness. Hutcheson contributed in this way to the development of what we may call the moral branch of English empiricism, which worked out a theory of sympathy. In her introduction of the first series of *Plays on the Passions*, Joanna Baillie makes use of the term "sympathetic curiosity," which reveals her debt, not only to the philosophy of the human mind in general but also and chiefly to this philosophy's contribution to ethics, namely the way it assisted in the fashioning of a system of morals. In what follows in this section, we look chiefly at the philosophers who represent what came to be called the Scottish Enlightenment.[7]

[7] The term was coined in 1900 by William Robert Scott (in reference to Hutcheson) "to designate the great eighteenth-century flowering of moral philosophy and the human sciences in the university towns of Lowland Scotland." (Manning et al., 71). See also Introduction to Broadie 2007.

Besides Hutcheson (1694–1746), the main representatives were David Hume (1711–1776), Adam Smith (1723–1790), Thomas Reid (1710–1796) and Dugald Stewart (1753–1828). To Stewart and his *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind* (1792), Baillie explicitly refers in the preface to *The Martyr* (a play originally published in 1826). Stewart, however, was one of the many literati; among them we we find also Edmund Burke, who partook in a debate over Smith's (Hutcheson's disciple's) treatise *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759).[8] Of importance, not merely biographical, is the fact that Baillie's father, Reverend James Baillie, was professor of divinity at Glasgow at a time when the passions- and sympathy--centred philosophy was at the height of its popularity.[9] Given the fact that Joanna left Scotland for London at the age of twenty-two, following the death of her father, we may safely assume that by that time she had absorbed some of the intellectual atmosphere of "her Scotts environment" (Armstrong, 56, note 8).[10]

Besides the larger context of the cultural environment, imbued with philosophy, in which Baillie grew up as a thinker and a poet, we have internal evidence of Baillie's absorption of the intellectual atmosphere of – to use James Buchan's phrase – "the Scottish moment of the mind." We have already mentioned Baillie's use of the term "sympathy." Let us at this point examine what she does with it in the "Introductory Discourse," her manifesto, as we might call it, prefixed to the 1798 *Plays on the Passions*. Here Baillie lays out a broad conceptual context, indeed a foundation, for her passions-centred drama. As the extended title of this volume, which – as we have noted – contains the first three plays, informs us, the project of "a series of plays" is about renewed attempts "to delineate the stronger passions of the mind." In the "Discourse" Baillie explains that the notion of "sympathetick curiosity towards others of our kind" (2001, 69) supplies a foundation for this project.

[8] The publication that helps us follow the debate is to be found among the works cited (see Reeder).

[9] Adam Smith was Professor of Moral Philosophy at Glasgow from 1752 to 1763.

[10] As a daughter of a Presbyterian minister, Armstrong argues, Baillie was "saturated in the culture and intellectual disputes of the Scottish Enlightenment" (Armstrong 2003, 56, note 8). This sounds convincing, which is not to say that this example of "cultural saturation" would not merit further investigation.

She defines "sympathetick curiosity" as man's natural "propensity" (the word frequently recurs), an innate inclination, in other words, that makes us take interest in others, and specifically in what our fellow creatures think and feel. The epistemological meaning of "this universal desire in the human mind to behold man in every situation" (70) ought not escape us: sympathetic curiosity is not only a natural but also an indispensable cognitive impulse, one which brings us into contact with other people.

The philosophy of sympathy, besides the epistemological and moral, also has other aspects, among them social and political. In the realm of dramatic art, sympathy carries a unique significance, which, however, is to a large extent a reflection of the way sympathy – in the real world – is the foundation for interpersonal relationships of different orders (familial, communal, national). Unsurprisingly, in her theoretical considerations, Baillie foregrounds the metadramatic significance of sympathetic curiosity; she calls upon it to explain the universal appeal of dramatic art and, as a consequence, to justify her occupation as a playwright. The playwright's task is to trace "the varieties and progress of a perturbed soul" (2001, 73) thereby to satisfy this desire, as Baillie self-consciously does in her plays. This task turns the playwright into a practical philosopher, the plays being so many studies in human nature (81).[11]

Baillie is thus intentionally indebted to the idea, expressed among other thinkers by Edmund Burke, according to which "our Creator has designed we should be united by the bond of sympathy" (42).[12] But it is in Adam Smith and his theory of moral sentiments that we find (as Baillie did) the term "sympathetic" used systematically as a technical term and in the sense in which it is used by Baillie.

According to Smith, "men are naturally sympathetic" (101). As scholars have repeatedly explained, the Smithan notion of sympathy is

[11] To be consistent, Baillie actually goes a step further and argues for the supremacy of drama over philosophy; drama fleshes out the abstract and dry notions of philosophy.

[12] This section of Burke's tract is entitled "The effects of SYMPATHY in the distresses of others." It has been reprinted in Appendix A of Duthie's edition of Baillie's *Plays*.

a technical term: "In the technical sense, to sympathise with someone is to have a feeling which one knows or suspects another person to have, and to acquire the feeling by imagining oneself in the very same circumstances that we know the other person to be in" (Broadie 1997, 155; editor's note).[13] What is more, Smith's conception of the spectator (as in, for instance, this passage: "the sympathetic indignation of the spectator" (Smith, 98)) prepares the ground for Baillie's metadramatic employment of the notion of sympathy. Indeed, as Alexander Broadie puts it: "For Smith, sympathy cannot be detached from spectatorship, for it is spectators who sympathise" (Broadie 2006, 158).

That Baillie's debt to Smith and other Scottish philosophers is not to be regarded as an unthinking appropriation becomes obvious if we take into consideration her conscious transference of the ideas to the theatrical medium, with special emphasis placed on dialogue and other than verbal types of interaction between characters on the stage. Some scholars have gone so far as to suggest that Baillie's project of plays on the passions "throws out a challenge to contemporary accounts of the emotions and particularly to a discourse of sympathy pursued by Adam Smith" (Armstrong, 23). We shall return to this assumption in due course. Smith certainly institutes sympathy as a transpersonal faculty.[14] This role of sympathy follows logically from the epistemological premise with which Smith opens his treatise: "As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation" (11). It is thanks to sympathy that we know what others feel; it is the sympathetic bond between persons that allows for what may be called emotional communication.

What is important for us to note is what role conception grants to the imagination. The role played by the imagination in interpersonal ("sympathetic") communication is crucial. Not only is the imagination clo-

[13] Broadie suggests that we should "think of sympathy as an adverbial modification of a given feeling": the spectator has another's feeling *sympathetically* (Broadie 2006, 164; see also 168–9).

[14] As Adela Pinch put it: "feelings are transsubjective entities that pass between persons" (19). Interesting as the reformulation may sound, neither Smith nor Hume speak of feelings actually passing from one person to another.

sely connected with the passions,[15] but it also allows us to perform the transsubjective leap into the minds of other people. Smith treats at some length of the latter function of the imagination. In his view, thanks to the imagination we can intuit the mental state of another person. This transsubjective intuition is a function of our minds that makes imagination indispensable: "By the imagination we place ourselves in his [another man's] situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him …" (12). We can be mentally transported as it were beyond the confines of our particular selves; we can almost become a person other than ourselves.

In relation to the passions, imagination functions on two different levels and in three different ways. On a personal level, the passions both influence the imagination and are influenced by it. The philosophers customarily occupied themselves with either or both of these types of influence. For instance, Smith devotes an entire chapter to "passions which take their origin from a particular turn or habit of the imagination" (the title of I.ii.2). On the interpersonal level, the imagination, in the way we have just described, affects a sympathetic link between the person under the influence of a particular passion (Smith speaks of the "person principally concerned" (25)) and the spectator. All these aspects have a moral dimension attached to them. Typically and to return to the problem of influence, Dugald Stewart in his *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind* sets apart a section of his treatise to discuss "the influence of imagination on human character and happiness." The main concern here is the potentially harmful influence that a disordered imagination can exert on the mind; cautions Stewart, "at length the most extravagant dreams of imagination acquire as powerful influence in exciting its [the mind's] passions, as if they were realities" (452).

[15] In the words of David Hume, "'Tis remarkable, that the imagination and affections have a close union together, and that nothing, which affects the former, can be entirely indifferent to the latter" (1981, 424).

Passions and Morals

Baillie's drama is ostensibly occupied with the operation of the passions in the mind of an individual person, as well as with their transmission amongst a community. According to Janice Patten, the real action in Baillie's plays on the passions is "predominantly psychological" (174). Isobel Armstrong, alluding to the medical occupation of Baillie's brother, Dr Matthew Baillie, calls her plays the "anatomy of the emotions" (55, note 8). By engaging the then current philosophy of the human mind, Baillie inevitably engaged a number of problems this philosophy addressed, including besides the epistemological dimension of sympathy the moral concerns just mentioned.

When speaking of the passions, Smith, as we have seen, singles out those which are "derived from the imagination," and which "take their origin from a particular turn or habit of the imagination." Both love and hatred provide appropriate examples. In her plays on the passions, Baillie devotes each of these two aseparate tragedy: *Count Basil* (set in Mantua in the sixteenth century, with a military conflict in the background) is a tragedy on love and *De Monfort* (set in a town in Germany) a tragedy on hatred. As regards the underlying moral philosophy, both tragedies illustrate and verify Smith's disapproval of these passions, an attitude that is at the same time, a recognition of their strength. Smith calls them "disagreeable" and repeatedly stresses the fact that they put considerable strain on the sympathetic propensities of the observer. As Smith sees it, love, though natural and "pardoned" at a certain age, makes it difficult for the impartial spectator to "enter into it," or to fellow-feel (38).[16] In other words, when we see others moved by these strong passions, we also have a sense of the limitations of our capacity to fellow-feel; there is always some disproportion between, for example, the intensity of love and its actual object (i.e. the loved person); that object's value, assessed impartially, does not justify the strength of the affection and so the spectator finds it "disproportioned." Two functions

[16] Love "is always laughed at, because we cannot enter into it"; and the reason for this limited ability to sympathise is that it is "extravagantly disproportioned to the value of [its] objects" (Smith, 40).

of the imagination are in conflict here: the object-passion disproportion in the mind of the person principally concerned prevents fellow-feeling in the observer, whose mind cannot enter into the mind of the enamoured or "doting" person.

For reasons that do not seem to require further elucidation, Baillie was primarily interested in examining strong as opposed to petty or transient passions, especially in her tragedies. As she tells us in the "Discourse," strong ones are those that take time to grow and have a capacity to take possession of and even devastate the soul. Whether, as some critics would have it, this determination in the playwright posed a challenge to Smith and other philosophers is debatable. However, Baillie must have been aware, if dimly, of the difficulties which this task posed for a dramatic artist. First of all, the project involved showing (or "delineating," as she puts it) the growth of a passion, not just its final or pathological stage. (She censures previous dramatists for their manner of limiting their representations of the passions to their most violent outbursts.) Secondly, given the possibility of a successful representation of the process whereby a passion gradually takes possession of the soul of the protagonist, it will still, because of its vehemence, prevent sympathy, and these both in the other figures of the play (on-stage spectators) *and* the audience (external spectators). These are serious difficulties, perhaps even obstacles, but Baillie does not address them in the "Discourse."

Moreover, there is the problem of the tragic genre. According to Smith, the inordinate strength of some passions obstructs their credibility, i.e. makes them implausible: "such passions [derived from the imagination], though they may be allowed to be almost unavoidable in some part of life, are always, in some measure, ridiculous" (38). Can then a *tragedian* successfully delineate a passion that the spectator (even if understood in the Smithan sense of the term) must find ridiculous? At this point, we can come up with the assumption that, conscious of the difficulty, Baillie simply decided to put a theory of the passions to the test of dramaturgy and of theatrical practice. As with any such test, however, the results are largely a matter of speculation, because only a few of the plays were staged and in the case of those that were (e.g. *De Monfort*) we have little direct access to the actual response of Baillie's audiences. What we must chiefly rely on is the text of the plays themselves.

As we shall see, the conclusions we have arrived at are also ridden with a degree of ambiguity, also of a moral nature. To make this sound clearer, we need to take a closer look at the literary material at hand.

In both early tragedies, there is much in the conceptual fabric that confirms that Baillie shared Smith's ambivalent attitude to strong passions; love and hate, though natural, are potentially destructive, both on the personal and the interpersonal levels.[17] In *Count Basil*, great emphasis is put on the disparity between the way in which the lover, Basil, feels about the object of his passion, and how other characters feel about him and his love:

> *Basil*. [about Victoria, the woman he dotes on] Long has she been the inmate of my breast!/ The smiling *angel of my nightly dreams*. … Yet, like a *beauteous vision* from the blest,/ *Her form has oft upon my mind return'd*; … (139).[18]

Here we are made aware of the role played by the imagination in giving rise to Basil's strong affection. At the same time, while strengthening his passion, the imaginary component, as we might call it, forecloses fellow-feeling. To represent this perceptual disparity, Baillie uses an onstage spectator; Basil's friend, Rosinberg, cannot enter into the mind of the thus love-bewitched companion: "What mean you now? Your mind is raving, Basil" (139). A more detached observer allows Baillie to describe Basil's infatuation by means of a telling metaphor: "Earth--kindled *fire*, which from *a little spark*/ On *hidden fuel* feeds its growing strength …" (141); Victoria's father, the Duke of Mantua, who will use Basil's weakness to serve his political ends, is perhaps the most brusque in his judgement: "*fantastic fancies* bind him thus …" (142). Elsewhere, we hear a suggestion that Basil has become slave to "ideal tyranny" (147). The word "ideal" occurs here in the then common sense of "imaginary," and, according to Duthie, Baillie may be indebted to Mary Wollstonecraft's reflections concerning the fantastic ("ideal") powers of woman over man. This idea is latter echoed by Rosinberg, who finds

[17] Compare Victoria's lines in *Count Basil*: "Were human passions plac'd within the breast/ But to be curb'd, subdu'd, pluck'd by the roots?" (147).

[18] Unless indicated otherwise, emphasis in the quotations has been added.

Basil "enthralled by a woman," and suspended over "a yawning gulph/ To which blind passion guides [his] heedless steps" (186–7). In return for the deficient fellow-feeling in a friend, Basil "disowns" him (188).

When disaster struck (Basil jeopardised the success of the military campaign and thus disgraced himself as a soldier), he comes to a full realisation of his weakness. In an anguished soliloquy that opens Act V, he himself employs the image of an abyss of fancy. He conjures up a vision of his unburied corpse as the source of a wanderer's terror, fleeing "the horrid place,/ With dark imaginations frightful made,/ The haunt of damned spirits" (201). In the terms of the Smithan theory of moral sentiments, Basil has rejected the (beneficial) intervention of the impartial spectators, which alone could help him mitigate his passion. Instead, he has allowed his inflamed fancy to take absolute hold of him, which has drawn him into a state of mental desolation. In this state of mind, no compassionate fellow-feeling can be expected but the imagination remains active (as his speeches show), though now as a source of torment. His suicide is imminent.

In *De Monfort*, the tragedy on hate, we unsurprisingly also find lines (perhaps even more sinister in tone) that point towards similar emotional and moral predicaments. The title hero-villain's speech hints at the difficulty in intuiting someone's passions because of their entanglement with mental "content" that is impenetrable to a bystander (spectator):

> *De Mon*. That man was never born whose secret soul/ With all its *motley treasure of dark thoughts*,/ *Foul fantasies*, *vain musings*, and *wild dreams*,/ Was open'd to another's scan. (314)

"Dark thoughts," "foul fantasies," "vain musings," and "wild dreams" lie on the periphery of the real world and as such forestall the operation of sympathy. Baillie, however, programmatically seeks to bring this murky peripheral stuff into the open space of the stage. The impression is that, in comparison with *Count Basil*, in *De Monfort* she proceeds more self-consciously. Here the main role in the explorations of the powers and limitations of sympathy is performed by Jane De Monfort, the hero's sister, the main and model sympathetic spectator in the play. In reply (albeit not a direct one) to her brother's scepticism expressed in

the lines just quoted, she offers what we may call an emotional therapy (described as "driving forth" wild and potentially criminal "fantasies"):

> I'll stay by thee, I'll cheer thee, comfort thee:/ Peruse with thee the study of some art,/ Or nobler science, that compels the mind/ To steady thought progressive, *driving forth/ All floating, wild, unhappy fantasies*;/ Till thou, with brow unclouded, smil'st again,/ Like one who from *dark visions of the night*,/ *When th' active soul within its lifeless cell/ Holds its own world, with dreadful fancy press'd/ Of some dire, terrible, or murd'rous deed*,/ Wakes to some dawning morn, and blesses heaven. (330)

What hints at the self-conscious quality of *De Monfort* is Baillie's use of the term "sympathy" in contexts that point up its technical meaning and its possible therapeutic function, both of which have their equivalent, and possibly a direct source, in Smith's treatise. We shall return to this presently. At the same time, as we have suggested, Baillie goes beyond philosophical perspicacity and sets herself the daring task of handling a passion that is "darker" than love, more directly ruinous (to the person principally concerned, the hater), and antisocial; De Monfort's hate poses a real threat to its object, a man called Rezenvelt.

Among the functions that Smith has devised for the impartial spectator is that of bringing down the violence of one's passions, which I believe justifies our use of the word "therapeutic," even though we won't find it in his treatise. Of the unsocial passions, such as hatred, Smith has this to say: "before we can enter into them, or regard them as graceful or becoming, they must always be brought down to a pitch much lower than that to which undisciplined nature would raise them" (41). This bringing down is a condition for a successful operation of sympathy; if the person principally concerned (De Monfort) is to expect the impartial spectator (his sister Jane) to fellow-feel his hatred, he needs to bring it down to a lower pitch to make it possible for that other person to enter into it. Baillie clearly constructed the character of Jane De Monfort in such as way as to make her an ideal or model spectator.[19] Jane is described as an angel in human form: "Jane

[19] The term "ideal spectator" appears in Part III of Smith's treatise. The impartiality of the Smithan spectator must not be misconceived as indifference. Jane's sisterly love of

De Monfort is not mortal woman" (337). She offers her brother unbounded and unconditional love and, as we have seen, proposes to help him curb his distempered imagination, which fuels his hatred. The question is: will she succeed in helping her brother to tone down the pitch of his hatred?

Baillie's dramatic employment and critical exploration of the then current philosophy is conspicuous in the way she weaves "sympathy" into the stage dialogue. Already in the first scene of the play, De Monfort's servant comments on the bizarre ways of his master saying that the "gloomy sternness in his eye … sullenly *repels all sympathy*" (305). This remark, it will be noted, hints at the key problem of the play, not only conceptual but also theatrical: a protagonist who "repels all sympathy" may not be a proper vehicle for the cathartic purgation of emotions that the genre of tragedy demands.[20] Another significant occurrence of "sympathy" is found in the scene, already discussed, in which Jane offers her brother emotional therapy. In reply, De Monfort sums up the major crux of the tragedy: "thou wilt despise me./ For in my breast a raging passion burns,/ *To which thy soul no sympathy will own*./ A passion which hath made my nightly couch/ A place of torment; …" (331). The difficulty is, first of all, of a moral nature; as we have seen, a model spectator, such as Jane, will not share a passion that is both unjustified and inordinately vehement. De Monfort seems to know this, and the realisation adds to his torment and possibly makes his figure tragic in the pedestrian sense of the word; the odd mental alliance between his passions and his imagination turns him into a victim (as much as the man he kills). We have here an either-or situation: either De Monfort brings down the pitch of his hatred to allow the impartial spectator sympathetically to enter into

her brother does not stand in opposition to her fulfilling the role of the impartial spectator in the Smithan understanding of the term.

[20] Here, without being able to dwell on the subject, we need to note that the relation of sympathy to the tragic catharsis was raised by Hume in his correspondence with Smith following the publication of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (see Reeder, already mentioned in a footnote above). The opening of Hume's essay "Of Tragedy" is worth recalling: "It seems an unaccountable pleasure which the spectators of a well-written tragedy receive from sorrow, terror, anxiety, and other passions that are in themselves disagreeable and uneasy" (2008, 126).

it, or Jane will somehow engender in her mind the same violent hatred for the object of De Monfort's. Both are impossibilities; the first would mean cancelling the catastrophic violence of De Monfort's hatred, the second compromising Jane's righteousness.

We can see clearly that the theoretical problems that the plays raise have a theatrical equivalent, to which we turn in order to examine the implications that the philosophy of sympathy had for Baillie's dramas as *acting* plays.

A Theatre of Tragic Passions

Verbal, and specifically conceptual, content is naturally only a part of any drama; its role depends on the overall conception of drama to which a playwright subscribes. Baillie's plays give the impression of spoken plays, which is in part what the idea of legitimate drama is all about. Yet, as we have pointed out, Baillie herself insisted on the importance of stage action. Unlike some romantics, Baillie wrote "acting plays" and her plays on the passions were written for the stage,[21] and indeed, in her project, the non-verbal component of dramatic action, the stage business, as we might call it, acquires special significance.[22] We shall now enquire into the modes of representation she thought to be fit vehicles for the issues she addressed in her plays on the passions.

Not all of Baillie's plays were staged, and the stagings of those that were, such as *De Monfort* (performed first in 1800 and then revived several times) were not received with enthusiasm (she herself used the word "feeble" to describe the reception). To some extent, the way Baillie formulates her project and even the few lines from her plays quoted so far allow us to see a part of the problem she had to confront. Her theatre was to be a theatre of dark passions, depicting and studying

[21] Writes Judith Slagle: "for she states consistently in her letters that these were to be 'acting plays'" (82). Baillie complained of the staging conditions in the London theatres of her time as unfavourable to the non-verbal content of her plays (the mime, etc.), chiefly due to the great distance between the actor and the audience.

[22] I have discussed this aspect of Baillie's drama in a recently published essay: Mydla 2009.

half-realised, half-concealed desires expressing themselves in gloomy imaginings. The tragedies show protagonists whose emotional states ("strong passions") repel fellow-feeling and banish them from the society of men. What were the means which she wished to use for her purposes?

There is no indication that Baillie attached special significance to stage design as a means to throw light into the hidden recesses of the souls of her protagonists; she must have regarded their behaviour as capable of performing this revelatory function. A dramatic character's behaviour is either verbal (dialogue, soliloquy) or nonverbal, both the behaviour that is explicitly described in the playtext (by means of stage directions) *and* the behaviour that is described and suggested in what is said on the stage. In her "Introductory Discourse," Baillie stresses the significance of the soliloquy, which confirms what we have said about the revelatory function she attached to language, or the verbal behaviour of the characters. She calls soliloquies "those overflowings of the perturbed soul, in which it unburthens itself of those thoughts, which it *cannot communicate* to others …" (105). Clearly, however, Baillie overlooks here the larger context and the problem that has to do with emotional interaction. That her Basils and De Monforts cannot share their passions with the other characters is evident; we have examined the reasons as we find them stipulated in Smith's theory of sympathy. The passions have grown to a point at which they have isolated the protagonists even from their closest and most sympathetic fellow creatures. The question that we need to ask is: have these protagonists been isolated also from the audience? Apparently, Baillie is confident that spectators can keep them company even in their darkest moments.

Baillie certainly goes a long way to help the audience comprehend the state of mind of her perturbed protagonists. The simplest means is to use *descriptive* language. In *De Monfort*, from the outset, i.e. before De Monfort's appearance on the stage, we are told what to expect. We are informed of how his behaviour has changed lately: he has been an "alter'd man," "difficult, capricious, and distrustful"; "sullen, haughty, ungracious" (304). We hear that "something disturbs his mind" (305). At the same time, as we have seen, we are warned that his sullen manner "repels all sympathy" (305). Indeed, the effectiveness of Baillie's

treatment of hatred consists in the way in which this passion makes the hero into an outcast. When we first see him, the stage directions describe him as "thoughtful" and given to outbursts that we put down to bad temper.

The situation becomes strenuous when De Monfort discovers that the man whom he regards as his mortal enemy, Rezenvelt, has come to the same town. This is a moment when Baillie lays stronger emphasis on non-verbal behaviour. When De Monfort first hears the news, his nonverbal behaviour makes conspicuous what his language would be powerless to conceal: he "starts from his seat, and lets the cup fall from his hand" (312). Indeed, unhampered expression comes only when he is alone, i.e. observed only by the spectators. In this moment, his violent manner corresponds to the violent language he uses in the accompanying soliloquy: "gives loose to all the fury of gesture, and walks up and down in great agitation" (313, stage directions). The problem, as we have suggested (and the playtext also hints at), is that the audience are to a large extent prevented from exercising their sympathetic propensity; we do not see what De Monfort's strong hatred can possibly be based on ("Hell hath no greater torment for th' accurs'd/ Than this man's presence gives –"); we have not yet even seen the object of this passion. And when we have, we do not find much in the man that would justify the way De Monfort feels about him.[23]

When finally confronted with Rezenvelt (De Monfort seems to have developed some extra sense which allows him to hear his approach even before others do! – Byron's favourite moment in the play), De Monfort cannot overcome his physical revulsion. Rezenvelt runs to him "with open arms" and an offer of reconciliation, but De Monfort "shrinks back from him" (345). Scenes like this create a palpable difference between how De Monfort feels about the object of his hatred and how we, i.e. the spectators, do; we have no grounds to hate Rezenvelt, *nor is it possible* for us to fellow-feel with De Monfort. This emotive disharmony between the psyche of the main protagonist (now slave to a strong passion) and the spectators, who – like De Monfort's sister – have limited access to

[23] For this reason, i.e. to supply De Monfort with more justification for the way he feels about his "enemy," the play was reworked extensively before it was performed.

the workings and contents of his imagination and who are not emotionally capable of keeping him company is not something that Baillie envisaged in her project. Indeed, a study of the tragedies, such as that attempted in this article, shows that, rather than explorations of the growth of strong passions, the plays are in fact explorations of the limitations of our sympathetic propensities. To rephrase this in the terms of Aristotelian poetics, while in classical tragedy we are expected and given a chance to experience cathartic purgation (due to our unhampered emotional involvement in the plight of the protagonist), in Baillie we remain tightly fixed in our position of judges, i.e. the impartial spectators of Smith's theory of moral sentiments.

The worry for the verbal texture of the plays is that the language, and especially the speeches of the protagonist, cease to be the vehicles for emotional or imaginative response. In this sense, the poetry hovers over a mental void. When, further in the play, De Monfort dreams of being an outcast "upon some desert coast" (353), this dream can hardly elicit our pity, if that was Baillie's goal. At the same time, he may terrify us with his murderous fantasising. Here he is thinking of a fitting place in which to carry out his bloody design: "That 'midst the murky darkness I might strike;/ As in the wild confusion of a dream,/ Things horrid, bloody, terrible, do pass,/ As tho' they pass'd not; …" (361). Lines like these may be read as an Baillie's attempt to create a proper setting for an action that is at once real (Rezenvelt *will* soon get killed, albeit offstage) and mental (De Monfort wades in his horrid imaginings). However, because Baillie does not put the source or cause of the passion she "delineates" in the external circumstances, the "action" takes place in the mind of the main protagonist. There may be more to her decision to remove the actual killing to an offstage space than a wish to observe decorum. The mind of her hero is also largely an offstage world, now virtually inaccessible to the audience.

As we have seen, simultaneously with the object of De Monfort's hate, Baillie introduces De Monfort's sister, Jane, whose function – if we might speculate about Baillie's authorial intention – would consist in mediating between the stage and the audience. But, if this was indeed Baillie's motive in devising this particular character, then as we have argued, Jane could fulfil this mediating function only to a very limited

extent. To be more precise, she can and does act as a sympathetic spectator in the common sense of "sympathy," but she cannot fellow-feel in the technical, Smithan sense. Similarly and for the same reasons, there are limitations on the degree to which Baillie's plays on the passions satisfy the "sympathetic curiosity" in the audience. As we have argued, there is an antagonism between the conceptual and theatrical aspects of Baillie's preoccupation with the passions, a tension that arises out of her debt to the philosophy of the mind. On the one hand, it is the imagination (as the tool of our sympathetic curiosity) that helps us to enter into and know the minds of the protagonists, that is, chiefly their passions as the basic motivational and actuating force. On the other hand, the working of the imagination in her protagonists is doomed to remain a mystery to the audience. The tragedies lead us where we cannot and perhaps even should not follow. For even though Baillie makes an effort to "delineate" the progress of a strong passion, such as love or hatred, we are still left with a keen sense of the incomprehensible or, to use a better word, impenetrable ("the unknown, the unbounded, the unfathomable"). Smith's philosophy explains why this is so.

It is then difficult to say what type of response Baillie had in mind when she spoke of the theatre as a school of morals ("Drama improves us by the knowledge we acquire of our own minds" (2001, 90)). Smith explains why the impartial spectator cannot enter into a mind that is actuated by passions which are unreasonably strong and which for this reason may be destructive or – as in the case of De Monfort – criminal. The alternatives that have presented themselves are two, but neither, I am afraid, would have made the playwright feel comfortable about her project: either Baillie wants us to fellow-feel with her protagonists (which would mean that we should share, for instance, De Monfort's homicidal hatred) or expects us to feel, as it were, against them. If we were to remain impartial and pass judgement on the protagonists (and actually fellow-feel with those they alienate and harm), we would need to rein in our sympathetic propensity and perhaps rely on apathy rather than sympathy.

There is no one satisfying solution to the problems that Baillie's project raises when confronted with the content of the plays. There are conceptual inconsistencies and there is what we might describe as emotional

turmoil. She may have been too philosophic about playwriting and the theatre; after all, a good play will never be another philosophic treatise. She may have been too "romantic" and thus not philosophic enough in her wholehearted poetic dedication to the passions and the imagination. There is little doubt, no matter which of these two suppositions is closer to the truth, that in approaching Baillie's plays and the theoretical discourse that accompanies them we encounter an imagination that has the capacity to spellbind and an intellect that has the power to intrigue.

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